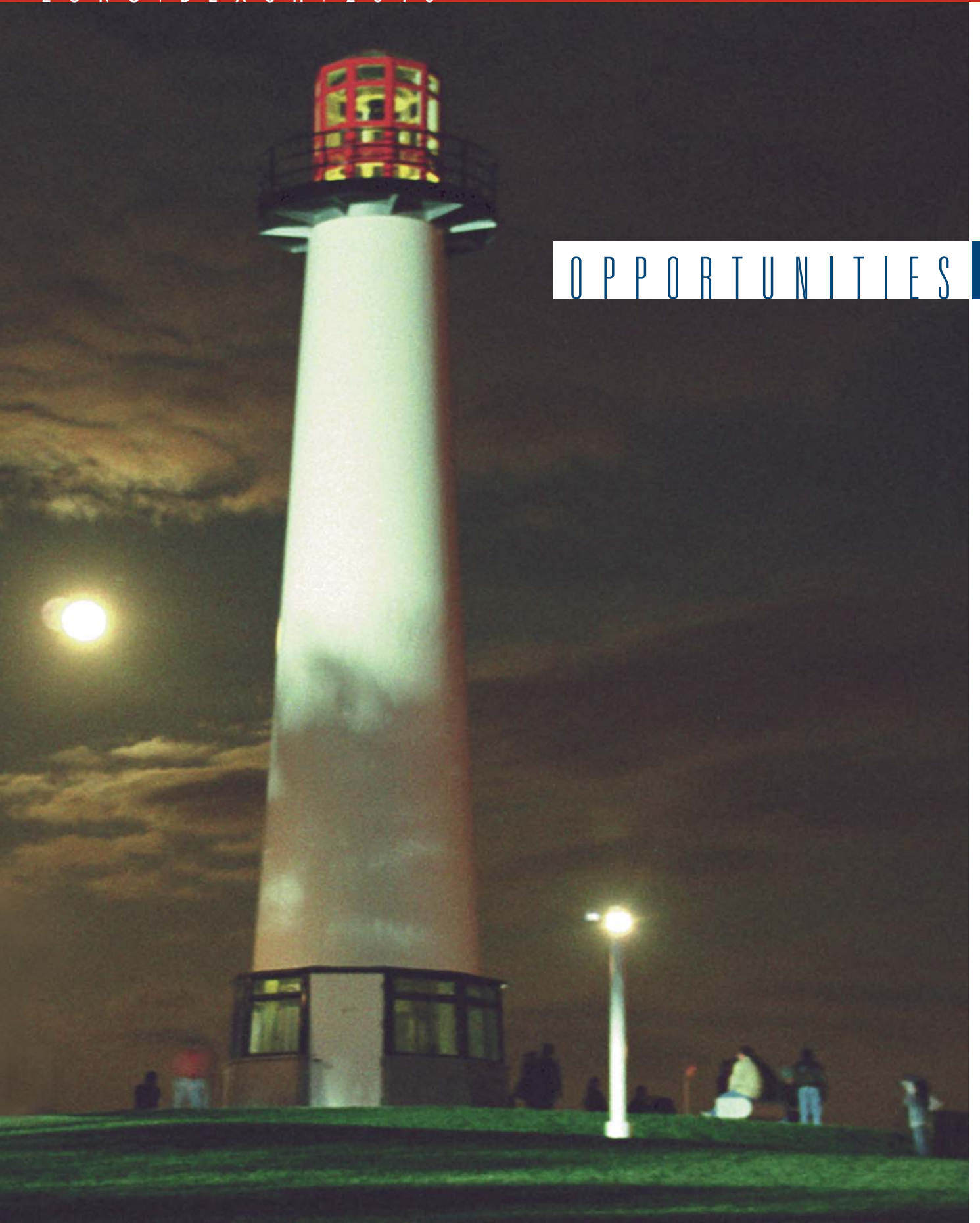


OPPORTUNITIES



“This Plan seeks to effect a cultural change in our community. It aspires to forge new partnerships to create a sense of civic pride and involvement that is the necessary condition for civic improvement.”

— Doug Otto

Facilitator, Strategic Plan Task Force

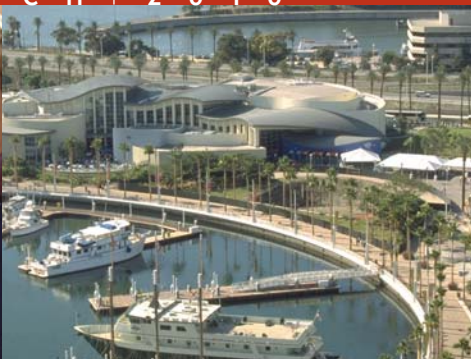
S AND CHALLENGES

In the years after its founding in 1897, Long Beach became known as a resort town of sand, surf, and sun. Early development of the harbor established our role as a strong player in international trade and a port of call for ships from throughout the world. In the 1920s, the discovery of oil added a new element to the economy and shaped our image as an oil town. During World War II, we became a Navy town and soon added aerospace as an important segment of our economy. After World War II, Long Beach was a stable and successful community. Then, beginning in the late 1970s, the city experienced the same sharp growth and immigration as the rest of Southern California.

Our first Strategic Plan, in 1986, recognized the city's tremendous growth in population and diversity and the need to broaden the economic base to provide the jobs and tax base necessary to manage this growth. It identified our oceanfront location as our most important resource, and focused on increasing international trade, revitalizing the downtown, and building the infrastructure necessary to restore our resort appeal.

Long Beach today has achieved much of what we set out to accomplish in that 1986 Plan. We have the largest container port in the nation and the combined Long Beach-Los Angeles Port is the third largest in the world. Our revitalized downtown is beginning to thrive with restaurants, retail, and new housing. We are recovering from economic recession, the loss of the Navy and the downsizing of Boeing. Our expanded Convention Center, world-class Long Beach Aquarium of the Pacific, and two respected art museums make Long Beach a destination point for visitors to Southern California from throughout the world. We have much to take pride in and much to build on.

But Long Beach continues to change. It's critical that we understand the forces now reshaping our city so we can recognize both our opportunities and challenges.



A Growing Population

Population change continues to have a critical impact on the city. Throughout our history, Long Beach has welcomed newcomers seeking opportunities on the western edge of the continent and enfolded their cultures, visions, and energy into a greater whole. Initially, migrants came from the United States heartland. During the past 25 years, immigrants have come mainly from Mexico, Latin America, and Southeast Asia. Many of these families are now in their second generation, and are increasingly important participants in our business community, educational institutions, political system, and cultural life.

Our city is projected to continue growing and to become even more diverse, adding about 33,000 people in the next ten years. By 2010, Long Beach is expected to be a community with a balance of four major ethnic groups: 36 percent Hispanic, 31 percent Caucasian, 19 percent Asian, and 12 percent African-American. This Plan will help us create a prosperous, livable community that can gracefully accommodate population growth and change, and provide an enduring sense of place.

Demand for Homes

Long Beach is a built-out city—little land is left for new housing or industrial expansion. As a result, new housing construction has not kept pace with population growth, resulting in a lack of affordable housing and severe overcrowding, especially in the central and southwestern areas of the city. In addition, home ownership has declined from 60 percent in 1960 to 41 percent in 1990. The increase in housing prices and rents make it increasingly difficult for many households to afford decent rental units or to purchase homes. As our community prospers, upwardly mobile residents may be forced to look elsewhere for quality housing unless we can meet their needs here in Long Beach. We need to confront the issue of quality, affordable housing in order to ensure our success as a community.

Education

Our educational system, too, shows the effects of growth and diversity. More than 38 different languages are spoken in Long Beach, straining the resources of the classroom. The public schools now enroll 92,000 students in schools designed to serve just 65,000. The School District is accommodating its 27,000 overflow students with portable classrooms, year-round schools, and busing. While educational achievement has been rising, Long Beach test scores remain below the statewide average. Young people with low achievement will be unable to succeed in our increasingly competitive, global information-based economy. Youth and education must be a focus of our plan for the future.

Needed Youth Services

A burgeoning population of children and youth, as well as an increase in the population of working parents, has left many youths on their own. Our parks, playgrounds, and libraries are crowded. Non-profit agencies and City departments offer some organized, constructive social activities for teens, but there is not enough. As a result, many youths are not realizing their full potential, not realizing the importance of belonging to a community, and are at risk for anti-social behavior. We must find the resources to encourage youth to engage in productive activities.

The Need for Economic Well-Being

While Long Beach suffered tremendous economic hits in the early part of the last decade, strong leadership and an aggressive economic development program have enabled us to rebound. Still, an above average poverty rate continues to affect our community. Partly, this is because the growth in employment has been disproportionately in lower paying jobs. In the future, economic growth needs to be measured not just in the number of new jobs, but also in the quality of those jobs. Economic well-being for the entire community can only be attained by developing a comprehensive business plan that provides the tools to allow Long Beach residents to help themselves and encourages job development in the new knowledge-based economy.

Enhancing Our Environment

Our identity as a city is closely tied to our rivers, wetlands, oceans, beaches and open space. Growth, however, may stress these assets. Our challenges are to overcome the potentially negative impacts of growth, to enhance the environment, and to add value to our neighborhoods and life experiences. This Plan recognizes those challenges and sets forth “sustainability” as the overall guiding principle to achieve our vision (see sidebar). The Plan creates the mindset necessary for a superb interconnected system of waterways, beaches, open space and livable neighborhoods. A healthy environment is the essential “soft infrastructure” of a successful and livable city.

sustainability

We have embraced “sustainability” as the basic guiding precept for our Strategic Plan. That means that we will meet the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their needs. It means that we will attempt to protect and restore our natural resources, not deplete or degrade them. It means that we will integrate goals to achieve the most successful and enduring outcomes.

A sustainable city is like a three-legged stool, with economic, environmental, and social legs equally supporting, providing the opportunity for a prosperous, healthy and dignified life for everyone.